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NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION: EFFECTS OF DISASTERS ON MODERN SOCIETIES

Technical session

Addendum

Urban environmental degradation and vulnerability to disasters

Summary of presentation by Mr. Mohan Munasinghe,
Division Chief, Environmental Policy, World Bank

1. The increasing pace of urbanization and the growing scale of urban-industrial activity is exacerbating environmental degradation in developing country cities, and increasing the vulnerability of urban dwellers to both natural and technological disasters. Sustainable development of urban areas requires a balanced approach, based on economic, social and environmental criteria.

2. The presentation will explore an integrated analytical framework to analyse the principal links between unsustainable urban development and vulnerability, especially in large cities. Physical and social impacts of disasters and their economic value need to be determined. The balance between investment projects, market incentives and regulatory measures to improve environmental management and reduce vulnerability require assessment of the relative costs and benefits of these actions. Information availability and education of urban dwellers, as well as risk perceptions and political motivations play a key role. Constraints at all levels of city government, especially those that hinder local community participation and action, are major problems. A major effort is required to encourage urban administrators to strengthen disaster preparedness, prevention and mitigation, redirect municipal spending, and learn from the experience of other urban communities.

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